





# THE LAYMAN'S GUIDE TO INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

BY  
**M. RAMAKRISHNAYYA**  
MANAGING TRUSTEE

The Layman's Guide to Inter Faith Dialogue  
by **M. Ramakrishnayya.**

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N.B.

H.S.H.T. is publishing this book to promote a better understanding of different faiths, While doing so, it wishes to add that all the members of the Trust do not necessarily agree with all the views expressed therein.

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## FOREWORD

Shri Ramakrishnayya is an extremely sincere and dedicated person who has worked for the cause of Indian unity through inter-faith dialogue. The trust sponsored by him is very aptly titled "Ham Sab Hindustani".

The slogan "Hindu-Muslim Bhai Bhai" coined during the freedom struggle to counter the British maneuver to divide the Indian people on religious lines proved to be counter productive and, in a way amounted to the acceptance of the divide. The axiom that religions do not divide proved wrong. In the process we lost the greatest Indian or the greatest Hindustani, Mahatma Gandhi whose heart and mind could not bear this division of Hindustanis. The only genuine response to his martyrdom can be that the people left in our motherland should call ourselves Hindustanis and our slogan should be "Hindustani Bhai Bhai". We are one country, one nation, one people, one family.

In order to consciously imbibe this feeling among all the people of our motherland Shri Ramakrishnayya has written this handy booklet Layman's Guide to Inter-Faith Dialogue. It has been very ably and sensitively written in true historical and social perspective. I hope it will bring about a healthy dialogue within each community and intrareligious communities.

The introduction and the Dialogue-issues-for interaction in the last chapter reflect the spirit and approach of this monograph.

We have reached a stage in global evolution where it is slowly being realised that no single religion can be the world religion. All religions are noble heritage of all human-kind. Unfortunately, they have been used as political parties, and, in the process, the spirituality of the religions is being lost. Humanity is in search of peace.

Ramakrishna Paramahansa had a vision of Christ and Mohammad. He lived his life in accordance with their teachings for a period to have the spiritual experience of their teachings/faiths. In the coming century all religions are going to be on trial. Whether they remain handmaidens of politics, or as in earlier periods, of kings and empire builders, or will usher in peace on earth, will be their true test. The spirituality of Jesus, Mohammad, Moses, Rama, Krishna, Buddha or Mahavira cannot be circumscribed in the water-tight containers of their assumed faith or religions. All those, who are born on this earth, have equal right over them. The world has become small and human beings are going to intensively explore all the well-springs of spirituality which manifested all through the history of mankind. The example of Ramakrishna Paramhansa is a pointer. One need not be baptised Hindu, Muslim, Sikh or Christian etc. to read, practise and experience the path of the spiritual leaders. Any restrictions on it will be resisted.

Gandhiji in his talks with C.F. Andrews, as reported in the Harijan dated 28th November 1936, said "Supposing a Christian came to me and said that he was captivated by the reading of the *Bhagavata* and so wanted to declare himself a Hindu. I should say to him : "No, what the *Bhagavata* offers the Bible also offers. You have not yet made the attempt to find out. Make the attempt and be a good Christian".....

"If a person wants to believe in the Bible, let him say so, but why should he discard his own religion? The proselytisation will mean no peace in the world. Religion is a personal matter. We should by living the life according to our lights share the best with one another, thus adding to the sum total of human effort to reach God".

"Consider", said Gandhiji "whether you are going to accept the position of mutual toleration or of equality of all religions. My position is that all the great religions are fundamentally equal. We must have the same respect for other religions as we have for our own. Mind you, not mutual toleration, but equal respect."

Swami Vivekanand, a disciple of Ramakrishna Paramahansa said that we not only tolerate but accept other religions. See how Gandhi and Vivekanand were talking the language of the future.

In a report by Leonard Garment in daily 'Asian Age' of 16th July 1996, taken from International Herald Tribune writes :

"But in the future, here and elsewhere, convictions about others perceived inferiority can easily turn into something ugly. We know this from history".

In November 1994, Pope John Paul II announced that he wanted to mark the third millennium of Christianity with acts of repentance for the Church's silence about totalitarian oppression and for centuries of hostility towards the Jews. Renunciation of systematic conversion have not come about because of sentimentality. Rather Christian leaders see that conversionism bespeaks condescension and contempt."

Baptists and Lutheran Churches have expressed a similar view.

Indian culture has been of the same view for thousands of years except for some sects in the last one century or so. This noble effort of Shri Ramakrishna as given above, shows the direction. It will help create a better understanding of Islam and Christianity and Indian Culture, wrongly called religion or Hinduism. Our civilisation and country is natural home for all religions and thoughts where there has been total freedom to seek God, Truth or Salvation the way one likes. Humanity lives at various levels of consciousness and each one should be free to pursue the path best suited to his or her level. If we continue on this path, India can be the land where all religious faith or paths can flower in the pristine purity without hostility or confrontation, without any feeling of superiority or inferiority and thus become a model to other nations and countries.

I welcome and commend Shri Ramakrishnayya's attempt in that direction.

Raj Bhavan,

Hyderabad, August, 1996

**KRISHAN KANT**

## PREFACE

The motto of Hum Sab Hindustani Trust (HSHT) is Integration through interaction. One of the modes of interaction it recommends is inter-faith dialogue. To help ordinary citizens to conduct such a dialogue, it has decided to bring out a brochure with the title, The Layman's Guide to Inter-faith Dialogue. A copy of the Manifesto of HSHT is included accordingly.

This brochure is, in a sense, an off-shoot of the Seminar on National Integration held by Prakasam Institute of Development Studies in March 1995. Several members of HSHT participated in the Seminar and conducted inter - faith dialogue. I have drawn liberally from the papers presented therein and the discussion that followed. Special mention may be made of the papers: Hinduism by Prof. P. Sriramachandrudu; Islam: According to Quran and the Traditions of the Prophet by Prof. Shah Manzoor Alam; and The Christian Perspective by Rev. Dr. Yesuratnam. Mention may also be made of the presentation made by Prof. Saleh Mohammed Alladin on Islam during the discussion.

Besides, I have greatly benefited from the study of the following books: Muhammad and the Quran by Rafiq Zakaria (Penguin Books, 1991); Major Themes of the Quran by Fazlur Rahman (Bibliotheca Islamica, Chicago, 1980); Mishkat Al-Masabih by James Robson (Sh. Md. Ashraf, Lahore, 1975); Islam, A Historical Survey by H.A.R. Gibb (Henry Martyn Institute of Islamic Studies, Hyderabad and Oxford University press, 1979); The meaning of the Glorious Koran by Mohammad Marmaduke Pickthall (Taj Company, New Delhi, 1991); Hinduism, the Eternal Religion by M.D. Chaturvedi (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay 1992); World Religions by Ganga Somany (OM Somany Charity Trust, Calcutta 1992); The Bhagavadgita As It is (A.C. Bhakti Vedanta Swami Prabhupada, Bhakti Vedanta Book Trust, Hare Krishna Land, Juhu, Bombay, 1992) and the Holy Bible (The Gideons, (1978).

With a view to keep the narrative smooth and free flowing, I have tried to avoid quotations from the scriptural texts except where I considered such quotations essential for authenticating the statements. The Koranic verses cited have been taken from Pickthall's book referred to above. References to Paighamber-E-Ikhlaq are taken from the Paper on Islam by Prof. Shah Manzoor Alam circulated at the Seminar of March 1995. Similarly, quotations from Manusmriti and other Hindu religious texts have been taken from Prof. Sriramachandrudu's paper at the above

said Seminar.

I am grateful to Dr. Andreas D' Souza, Director, Henry Martyn Institute of Islamic Studies, Hyderabad, who went through the manuscript and gave valuable suggestions. I also acknowledge with thanks suggestions made by my colleagues in HSHT. I must, however, admit that I have not been able to accept some suggestions, particularly those for omitting some points. For, in my opinion a brochure purporting to be an aid to dialogue should contain all points of view, however controversial some of them may be. I do hope that my colleagues in HSHT will understand my action in the spirit of our commitment to genuine interaction.

I am aware of the difficulties and pitfalls in summarising the profound messages and teachings of the three religions which have been elaborated over the centuries by several learned men through commentaries. I do not therefore claim that this presentation is either complete or comprehensive. I plead with the reader to pardon me for any deficiency or bias that may have unconsciously crept in. If the following chapters arouse in the readers sufficient interest and ability to carry on a dialogue and to discover the important commonalities that are essential for harmonious living and satisfactory accounting before the Almighty on the appointed day, I shall feel amply rewarded.

I wish to record my thanks to Shri S. Malleshwar Rao, who typed the manuscript more than once speedily and efficiently.

Hyderabad, February 1997

**M. RAMAKRISHNAYYA**

# MANIFESTO OF HSHT

## # ORIGIN

A group of concerned citizens, greatly anguished by the recent trend of events in the country, decided in February 1993 to start a movement for promoting understanding and goodwill among the people of India. The group registered itself as a trust with the name Hum Sab Hindustani Trust in March 1994.

## # MANIFESTO AND OBJECTIVES :

1. We are all children of Hindustan that is India, that is Bharat. Together we salute our motherland and declare that people of Hindustan constitute one nation, despite our diversities of various kinds.
2. We believe that while diversity is a fact of life in Hindustan, unity of approach is essential for life itself and diverse groups must learn to live harmoniously each in its own interest.
3. We affirm that harmony can be achieved by practicing integration through interaction i.e. fair and frank discussion with a view to balancing the needs of unity and the demands of diversity.
4. We hail the provisions of our Constitution, particularly the Directive Principles, Fundamental Rights and Fundamental Duties and their implementation in letter and spirit as the best path for achieving the above said balance between unity and diversity.
5. We proclaim in the context of Hindustan, Secularism means equal respect for all religions and the state as well as the citizens must sincerely endeavour to put this to practice in all spheres of activity.
6. We assert that every group, large or small that wishes to stress its identity on the basis of religion, caste, language, culture or ethnicity must simultaneously ensure that the pursuit of its identity does not unduly impinge on the rights, sentiments and interest of other groups and every group must adopt the spirit of 'give and take'.
7. We think that the present diversities are the outcome of a long and complex historical process and it will be entirely wrong and unwise to interpret historical events in terms of the present group identities and nurse illwill, hatred or revenge against each other, in total disregard of the assurances of the historic Constitution which has opened a new era of liberty, fraternity and nationhood.
8. We urge that the best way of sublimating the historical memories of injustice, injury and suspicion, real or imaginary is to practice forgiveness, mutual understanding and mutual adjustment.
9. We deprecate attempts of any group to seek the intervention of foreign governments or political bodies in national issues.
10. We adopt inter-alia the following measures for achieving the above objectives.
  - (a) Common meetings of representatives of diverse groups at all levels to promote national unity and mutual understanding among the diverse groups.
  - (b) Highlighting the essential ethical unity of all religions.
  - (c) Collection and dissemination of correct information on all matters affecting the unity and harmony of the nation.
  - (d) Promotion of socialisation among the groups, as a part of nation building.
  - (e) Inter-faith dialogue.
  - (f) Demonstration of pride in and commitment to the rich cultural heritage of the nation since the days of the hoary past.
  - (g) Coordination with similar initiatives in other parts of the country.



- (g) Coordination with similar initiatives in other parts of the country.
- (h) Taking all other measures in furtherance of the above objectives.

#### # ACTIVITIES :

1. Round Table on Ayodhya, Ordinance and After, January 1993
2. Kavi Sammelan and lectures on Integration through Interaction, March, 1993
3. Public Lecture on Kashmir November, 1993.
4. Lecturers in Administrative Staff College, Osmania University on Fundamental Duties.
5. First Annual Convention on National Integration, February, 1994.
6. Seminar on Religions and National Unity, March, 1995
7. Seminar on Historical Memories and Nation building in India, August, 1996.

Proceedings of 1 and 6 have been published with the help of Prakasam Institute of Development Studies. Madina Education Trust helped in publishing the minutes of the Convention at 5.

#### # PUBLICATIONS PLANNED.

1. Layman's Guide to interfaith dialogue.
2. Layman's Guide to historical memories
3. Layman's Guide to the needs of diversity and the demands of unity.

#### # MANAGEMENT :

HSHT is managed by a Trust Board consisting of intellectuals professing different religions and languages.

Their names are given on the last page. There is also a General Council which is meant to facilitate the association of a larger number of like-minded citizens with the Trust's self-chosen task of nationa building. Names of members of the Council may be seen on the last page. The Trust Board has decided to expand the Council to a hundred. Interested citizens can join by paying Rs. 500/- in one or two instalments. Five members of the General Council will be co-opted by turns to join the Trust Board.

#### # HOW TO BECOME MEMBER OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL :

Persons desirous of joining the General Council may contact Shri P. Purnachandra Rao, Trustee-in-charge, F-5, HIG II, Block 12, APHB, Baghlingampally, Hyderabad-500 044. (R) 7665770.

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## CHAPTER - 1

### INTRODUCTION

Communal amity, particularly between religions communities, is the most important need of contemporary India. One may ask why religions should divide the people instead of uniting them in their quest for God and salvation. The answer to this question lies in the general ignorance of the common features of the several religions and the undue emphasis on the differences among them, arising largely from the circumstances of their origin and the history of their spread. These factors can be corrected through inter-faith dialogue. This brochure aims at providing guidance in the conduct of a fruitful dialogue. It will focus attention on the three most populous religions of India, Hinduism, Christianity and Islam.

If the inter-faith dialogue is to be fruitful, we have to bear in mind four points which Gandhiji used to stress. They are as follows :

- (a) No religion should be torn out of its socio-cultural context, as every religion has the birth-mark of the society in which it is born;
- (b) The most important thing in religion is inner sincerity or inner voice;
- (c) It is essential for the followers of one religion to study other religions and interpret them reverentially and not in a hostile way;
- (d) Scriptures cannot transcend reason and truth as they are intended to purify reason and illuminate truth.

Further, in the Indian context, the participants in the inter-faith dialogue should have the following attitudes :

- (a) Respect the other's preference in matters of faith.
- (b) Eschew the feeling of superiority of one's own religion over that of another and thus avoid the usual consequences of such a feeling viz., excessive pride, aggrandisement, contempt, and violence;
- (c) Realise that salvation, the ultimate goal of life according to one's own religion, can be reached only through one's own efforts and deeds and not on the basis of the activities of one's co-religionists or one's religious community.
- (d) Understand the duties and obligations of one's own religious community in a pluralist society governed by a secular and democratic nation-state as a quid pro quo for the fundamental rights guaranteed to it by the Constitution.

It is proposed to give a brief account of the common and special features of the three major religions in the chapters that follow. Each chapter will deal with an important theme. The chosen themes are the Concept of God, Approach to God, Relations between Man and Man, Relations between Man and Woman, Relationship between Man and Nature and Relations between Man, Religion and State.

But before embarking on such a detailed exercise, it will be necessary to understand the circumstances in which each religion was born, the nature of its scriptural authority and the manner in which it has spread. This information, it is hoped, will explain the special features of each religion as it is now practised in India. There is no doubt that over the years, every religion underwent changes and gathered accretions and distortions.

## CHAPTER -2

### HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

In this chapter, a brief account is given of the origins and history of the three religions, Hinduism, Christianity and Islam.

#### HINDUISM

Hinduism's original name is Sanatana Dharma. The present name was coined by the Greeks, Arabs and Westerners to describe the religious theories and practices of the people living beyond the river Sindhu (Indus). Sanatana Dharma is usually translated as Eternal Religion, although the word religion is not the exact synonym of Dharma, a word derived from the Sanskrit root 'dhr', meaning 'to support'. Sanatana does not mean eternally fixed as it provides periodical renewal, interpretation and reaffirmation. When in view of the above said ambiguities, Sankaracharya of Kanchi was asked to drop the word Hinduism and bring Sanatana Dharma again into circulation, he said that it was too late to do so and a change at this stage would lead to confusion among the Hindus as well as the non-Hindus. Hinduism is undoubtedly the oldest living religion. Its basic scriptures are the four Vedas: Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda and Atharvanaveda. Rig Veda contains 'psalmic prayers to the devas' which are meant to be recited while making Hotru Karma or sacrifices to God. The Yajurveda contains detailed instructions on sacrificial rituals. The Samaveda is the veda of music. The Atharvanaveda deals with sciences such as biology, medical science, cosmology, political science and metaphysics. Mantra, yantra and tantra are prescribed therein for the attainment of all knowledge.

The Vedas are believed to be 'apaurusheya' or not made by man. They are also described as 'sruti' or that which is heard. Great importance is accordingly attached to pronunciation, syntax and the style of recitation. The Vedic mantras were transmitted by the 'Rishis' to their disciples. After several generations of such transmission, they were codified and compiled into four separate books by Maharshi Vyasa who came to be known as Veda Vyasa. Each Veda has three sections: Upasana Kanda dealing with prayers of hymns to gods; Karma Kanda describing rituals; and Jnana Kanda containing philosophical discourses on the nature of self, bondage and liberation. These sections are also referred to as Samhita, Brahmana, Grantha and Upanishad or Vedanta respectively. So far, 280 Upanishads have been traced. Eleven of them are considered highly important. In fact the three great acharyas, Adi Sankara, Ramanuja and Madhava wrote commentaries on them and founded separate schools of philosophy and rituals of worship (Advaita, Vishistadwaita and Dwaita respectively). Some Upanishads used the style of dialogue or question and answer, thereby stressing the spirit of enquiry and rational

thinking.

Next in importance and authority to the 'Srutis' are the 'Smritis' or those which are remembered. They are also called Dharmasastras which deal mainly with the rules and regulations governing the individual, family and society. They are the Manusmriti, Yagnavalkyasmriti, Sankha-Likhita Smriti and Parasara Smriti.

Puranas or Itihasa (e.g., Ramayana and Mahabharata) were conceived as the medium for disseminating the Vedic Knowledge to the common people who could not be expected to undergo the rigours of Vedic studies. They consist of history, stories and allegories, designed to spread the knowledge of dharma or Sastachara (ethical conduct) among the masses. In fact, the Puranas have been described as the fifth Veda in Vishnupurana. The Bhagavatgita which is a part of Mahabharata is hailed as the essence of Upanishads. It is also in the form of a dialogue between Lord Krishna and Arjuna.

It will be clear from the above narrative that Hindu religious thought as finally expounded in Gita evolved over a long period of time through divine inspiration as well as speculation, discussion and debate among the great Rishis and other learned men of Bharat. It responded constructively to the challenges posed from time to time by new religious movements. When in the 6th century B.C., the excesses of Vedic rituals and social protests threw up new religions like Buddhism and Jainism, Hinduism responded in due course by adopting Buddha as an avatar of Vishnu and by emphasising the principle of Ahimsa or non-violence in its own ethics. Later, faced with the Islamic doctrine of total surrender to God, it developed its own Bhakti cult through re-interpretation of ancient texts. Hinduism's response to Christianity is to internalise the concept of social service mission as in the case of Ramakrishna Mission. Mention may also be made here of the reform movements of Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj and Jyotirao Phule.

At present, many modes of worship are found among the Hindus, the major ones being Vaishnavite, Shaivite and Shakta. Besides, Mother Goddess is worshipped in villages under different names, particularly by the lower castes who treat them as the presiding deities of their crafts or occupations. Visits to temples dedicated to their favourite gods and goddesses, pilgrimages to sacred places and dips in sacred rivers are important parts of Hindu way of life. Though there is no close-knit organisation with religious authority like the christian church, Sankaracharyas, Jeers and Swamis of different denominations provide spiritual guidance to their respective followers. This trend is perhaps based on the scriptural admonition that a guru is necessary for attaining perfection in spiritual matters.

Julius Lipner of the Faculty of Divinity of the Cambridge University likened Hinduism to the great Indian banyan tree, "an inter-connected collection of trees and branches in which the same life-sap flows: one, yet many". He also calls Hinduism "a universe of inter-locking worlds in which the shock waves to the whole are distributed and absorbed through mutual support between the parts".

The most prominent, albeit much misunderstood, feature of Hindu society is the caste system and the religious sanction behind it. The related concepts of out-caste and untouchability also need to be noted. It is said that the system began as a differentiation of varna or colour of skin, as in the case of Aryans and Non-Aryans and developed into some kind of division of labour among occupational classes. This is evident from the proliferation of castes and sub-castes among the original four Varnas of Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas, and Sudras. The many sub-castes prevalent among the Sudras are often based on occupations. There is no doubt that at one time the caste principle helped in integrating different tribes and immigrant communities. The Gita says that character and past karma and not birth should determine the caste of a person. However, in practice, birth alone became the determining factor. The concept of caste acquired in due course the rigidities and inequities of the modern day, due mainly to machinations and pressures of vested interests in the upper castes. There are many passages in Manusmriti, Mahabharata and other Vedic literature which allude to inter-caste marriages (Anuloma and Pratiloma) and the consequent emergence of numerous sub-castes; and how birth acquired primacy over good qualities like truthfulness, humility, freedom from hatred and wickedness, and tapas, in the recognition, of one's brahminhood and how persons of lower castes were prevented from attaining brahminhood and rishitwa through tapas and learning. There are also instances of the leaders of higher castes preventing those of lower castes from acquiring the former's skills and status. Many reformers down the ages have preached and fought against the pernicious caste divisions and the practice of untouchability. The Constitution of November 1949 is the first legal measure in India to set aside caste as a principle of social organisation and promulgate the rights of equality and fraternity of individuals. But the caste system has been persisting, though with some changes, even among the people converted to different religions like Islam and Christianity, although they are doctrinally free of it. Instances of caste conflicts are also reported from time to time. While attempts at eroding the caste system systematically through affirmative action and eventually abolishing it must continue, the immediate need is undoubtedly communal amity among the castes. To this end, peaceful and meaningful interaction among the castes has to be promoted, eschewing the feelings of revenge and hatred.

Hinduism is largely confined to India. If some Hindus are now found in other parts of the world, it is because of migration in search of prosperity and other non-religious factors. This is true even of the pockets of Hindu influence in South-east Asia. The few instances of Hindu adventurers establishing kingdoms in Cambodia and other lands, that history records, do not partake of the character of religious expansionism. In other words, Hinduism did not sanction or promote conversion unlike Islam and Christianity. Conversions by the organisers of Arya Samaj since the second half of the 19th century are a modern innovation. Even this movement could not acquire the scale or intensity of the conversions by other competing religions. The original doctrine of Hinduism, 'Swadharme Nidhanam Sreyam' (better die in your own faith) seems to hold the field. Some Hindu leaders have been expressing alarm at the rate of conversion of Hindus to Islam and Christianity and at the consequential depletion of the number of their co-religionists. Conversions occur due to several reasons, which include the hope of higher social status and other inducements held out by the conventors. However, this fear of conversion has contributed, in some degree, to the erosion of amity between Hindus and other religious communities in India.

It may be noted that the Supreme Court tried to define Hinduism while disposing of some writs. It found the exercise difficult in view of the facts that unlike Islam and Christianity, it does not trace its authority to a single book or single Prophet and it recognises the validity of different interpretations of Truth. It, therefore, concluded by calling it a way of life, the main characteristic of which is tolerance and respect for other ways of life and other perceptions of Truth. That this characteristic is being denied in practice by some Hindus in recent years is indeed deplorable.

## **CHRISTIANITY**

Jesus Christ, the founder of Christianity was born a Jew during the reign of Caesar Augustus, the Roman Emperor, in one of his provinces, Judea (modern Israel) which was being governed by a wicked king named Herod. At that time, the Jewish priestly classes were steeped in superstition and exhibited heartless legalism and lure for power in interpreting the Old Testament Law. The people were expecting the birth of a Messiah, a new kingly person, who would deliver them from the excesses of the priests, the cruelties of Herod and the bondage to Rome. But, Jesus grew into a preacher and beckoned the Jews to the kingdom of Heaven which was declared to be 'at hand'. He declared himself Son of God and went about healing the people of their ailments by performing miracles. His characteristic sympathy for the poor and the needy, his criticism of the Jewish religious establishment, his indifference to Jewish politics and his refusal to be the King of

the Jews caused great disappointment and resentment among the Pharisees, Sadducees and other Jewish leaders. This eventually led to his betrayal and crucifixion on the grounds of blasphemy and sedition. According to the Bible, the tomb of Jesus was found empty two days after his burial and the Resurrection took place. He is reported to have appeared to his disciples repeatedly and explained to them the meaning of his life and death. The miraculous Resurrection of Jesus, the 'Lord' and Saviour became the core of Christianity.

Jesus chose twelve out of his followers for propagating the faith and named them Apostles. One of them, Judas Iscariot betrayed him. The remaining eleven were filled with the Holy Spirit on the Jewish feast of Pentecost, about fifty days after the Resurrection and were committed to the mission of spreading the gospel. Peter and Paul took the message to the peoples of Asia Minor and Rome, while Thomas is credited to have brought it to India. The new religion made slow but steady progress, claiming more and more followers from different countries, despite the distrust of the political and intellectual leaders of the time. It received a boost in the early part of the 4th century when the Roman Emperor, Constantine was converted and it became a state religion.

The manner in which the Christian religion was propagated by different Apostles and the comparative freedom enjoyed by the early Christians to interpret the teachings of Jesus gave rise to different organisations. Churches began as halls of worship for small independent communities. They came together to form a central organisation. Eastern Orthodox Church and Roman Catholic Church are two such formations. They became separate in the 11th century as they could not see eye to eye on some principles of doctrine and discipline. The Roman Catholic Church, founded by Peter, one of the disciples of Jesus, grew from strength to strength due to its proximity to the political power of the time. The Bishop of Rome became the Pope, the supreme head of all Roman Catholic churches. After passing through several vicissitudes, the papacy assumed the status of an independent state in the Vatican, a city within a city.

The next important event in the history of Christianity is the Reformation in the 15th century when Martin Luther and John Calvin questioned the authority of the Pope and established Protestantism and Puritanism respectively. England saw the rise of the Anglican church due to the various compulsions of the Tudor King, Henry VIII. From then on, numerous church organisations grew up, their main feature being non-conformism with specific religious rules or the originally ordained form of worship. History records numerous instances of bloody conflicts between the different churches, persecution of followers of one by another and extreme



intolerance among the followers of Christ. It took several decades of atrocities, the compulsions of the emerging economic system and the dawn of the Age of Enlightenment to convince the religious and political leaders of christendom about the wisdom of the dictum of Jesus : "Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and unto God what is God's". Secularism, that is, separation of religion from statecraft, became the order of the day progressively from the eighteenth century.

Simultaneously, different churches launched missionary institutions to render social service, to spread their versions of the gospel in other lands and to convert the peoples of Asia and Africa, professedly 'to save their souls'. The empire-building exercises of European powers lent valuable support to the evangelists. The latter in turn provided moral support to the expanding European rulers in their pursuit of slave trade and other questionable practices during the 17th and 18th centuries. Thus Christianity established its presence in all the continents.

Over the centuries the followers of Christ set up different sects and denominations for reasons of theology, rituals or even simple factors like origin and location. However, a remarkable event has occurred in the twentieth century, the formation of the World Council of Churches. This Council promotes inter-denominational dialogue among the protestants. In the Catholic church too a similar trend has begun. The Vatican Council has recently introduced long-awaited changes heralding openness towards other denominations and religions. Thus Ecumenism has become a movement. Several affiliates of the World Council of Churches have embarked on dialogues with other religions. This is due partly to the reassessment of the spiritual experiences of other religions and partly to the increasing resistance of the followers of other religions and their political authorities.

It is appropriate to take a brief note of how Christianity spread in India. It predates the spread of the faith in Europe. The first Indian Christians were called the "Syrian Christians" of Kerala who owe their origin to Nestorian Christianity brought to India in the first or second century A.D. Later, the Portuguese brought the Roman Catholic faith to Bombay, Goa and Cochin. Still later, the protestant form of Christianity grew after an English missionary, William Carey translated the Bible into Bengali, Sanskrit and other languages at Serampore (a Danish territory in Bengal) with the help of a team of scholars, Indian and foreign.

While the number converted to Christianity was not large, the evangelists had indirect but profound effects. Their criticism led to the reinterpretation of Hinduism and Islam by men like Ram Mohan Roy and Syed Ahmed Khan. It must be remembered that the early Indian Christian leaders like W.C. Bonnerji, Narayan Vaman Tilak, Pandita Remabai and K.T. Paul, were both nationalists and social

reformers, who took part in the Indian National Congress and in social reform movements.

Early in the 20th century, a movement began for the indigenisation of Indian Christianity, led by Syrian Orthodox priests in Kerala, Sadhu Sundar Singh (a convert from Sikhism) in the Punjab, and (after independence) by catholic priests influenced by the Papal Encyclicals of Pope John XXII. Another trend in post-independence India is the rise of Dalit theology, spearheaded by Christians of "untouchable" origin and influenced by the liberation theology of Latin America.

It is a remarkable testimony to the resilience of the Christian tradition in India that one of the first United churches in the world - if not the very first - was the Church of South India, inaugurated in 1947. This was followed by the Church of North India, inaugurated in 1971. These church unions brought together most of the existing Protestant sects, from Baptists and Methodists to Anglicans. The impetus of these major events needs to be carried further by bringing together (in ecumenical dialogue and, ultimately, unity) the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches. The time is ripe for this, after the Papal acceptance of inter-faith dialogue and the liberal movements in the Roman Catholic church.

## ISLAM

Islam originated from the preachings of Prophet Muhammad who was born in 570 A.D. in Arabia, and it is based on the revelations of God to the Prophet through the medium of the angel Gabriel during a long period of 23 years. Holy Koran is the record of these revelations. H.A.R. Gibb says in his book, *Islam* at page 24: "Muhammad's own belief, which is still held without question by his followers, was that these discourses were portions of a 'Heavenly Book' sent down to or upon Muhammad in an Arabic version, not as a whole but in sections of manageable length and in relation to the circumstances of the moment". When the Prophet repeated the verses to his Companions, they learnt them by heart, while some of them wrote the verses on stone, parchment, ribs of camels and pieces of leather. Attempts to compile the revelations systematically and arrange them in a book form were started soon after the death of the Prophet in 632 A.D.

According to Syed Anwar Ali (*Quran: The Fundamental Law of Human Life*, Vol 1., Hamdard Foundation Press, Karachi, 1987), Abu Bakr, the first Caliph (632-634 AD) ordered Ziad Ibn Sabit, the scribe of the Prophet to compile the Koran, as he and Umar, another companion (who later became the second Caliph) felt, after the battle of Yamamah (Syria), that with the death of "a great many readers of the Quran", "much will be lost from the Quran because every person remembers something of

it". Zaid first wondered how he could do 'a thing that the Prophet of God did not', But eventually, under Abu Bakr's pressure and as a result of his own rethinking, he collected all the Koranic verses from the date palm leaves, white stones and 'breasts of people that remembered it'. The collection remained with Abu Bakr till his death when Umar took it over. On Umar's death, it remained with his daughter, Hafsa till Uthman, the third Caliph (644-645 AD) got them arranged in the form of a book after a thorough scrutiny by a group of four consisting of Zaid Ibn Sabit and three other Quraishi Scholars well-versed in the Meccan dialect of the Prophet. A uniform mode of recitation was also laid down. Anwar Ali quotes approvingly the following statement of Sir William Muir (in Life of Mohamet): "Transcripts were multiplied and forwarded to the chief cities in the empire and the previously existing copies were all, by the Caliph's command, committed to the flames".

Uthman's codified version has remained intact ever since, except for the addition of some phonetic symbols in the seventh century and the resolution of some differences among scholars in the ninth century. Anwar Ali adds : "..... and there is probably no other book in the world which has remained twelve centuries with so pure a text". Muslims regard the Koran as absolutely unchangeable, as it is believed to be literally the Word of God. The slightest suggestion of alteration or modification in it is deeply resented and sometimes violently resisted.

Next to the Koran, Traditions of the Prophet or Hadith, containing accounts of Muhammad's words and deeds, constitute the most important component of the teachings of Islam. This is based on the Koranic injunction that the Muslims must obey Allah's Prophet and the belief that in whatever the Prophet said and did, Muhammad must have been acting under divine guidance and inspiration. According to James Robson (Mishkat Al-Masabih), Shafii, the great jurist (725-825 A.D.) propagated the concept of tradition as a basis of Islam by interpreting the Koranic phrase, 'the Book and the Wisdom' (2:151; 3:164; 4:113; and 62:2). The compilation of Hadith commenced nearly 150 years after the death of the Prophet. Not all compilers were meticulous, with the result that the compilations had to be classified into three categories, Sahih or totally reliable, Hasan or highly reliable and Zaeaf or weak. Six compilations which fall in the first two categories are generally considered to be the most authentic: Sahih Bukhari, Muslim Sharif, Ibn Majah or Muta Imam Malik, Tirmizi, Abu Daud and Nasai. Sunnis and Shias have separate collections of Hadith.

The elevation of Traditions as described above, has to be read with a cautionary note sounded by Muhammad in the following words : "I am a mere human being. When I command you to do anything about religion in the name of God, accept it,

but where I give my personal opinion about worldly things, bear in mind that I am human being and no more ". (Abul Husain Muslim: Sahih Muslim, Vol IV, P. 1259 quoted by Dr. R. Zakaria at P.7, Muhammad and the Quran, Penguins, 1990). Some scholars have, questioned the great sanctity attached to the Hadith. Dr Zakaria refers at P.55 of his book to the criticism by Orientalists of several spurious versions in circulation and the strong reaction of Muslim theologians, towards them. He writes : "Imam Rashad Khalifa, a Saudi Arabian Theologian, has gone to the extent of opining, after considerable research in original sources, that some of "the extremely popular Hadith (Traditions) and Sunna (Practices) having nothing to do with Prophet Muhammad' and further that obedience to them is tantamount to a 'flagrant disobedience of God and His final Prophet". However, it must be stressed that a large majority of Muslims reject the view of this theologian. They assert that determined efforts were made by scholars to weed out the spurious ones and the six collections of Hadith accepted as genuine by the said scholars have been declared as authentic. As a result of the elevation of Hadiths, the Prophet is held in very high esteem. As Prof. Wilfred Cantwell T. Smith says, "...to disparage Muhammad will provoke from even the most 'liberal' sections of the community, a fanaticism of blazing vehemence". (Modern Islam in India, Lahore 1947, P. 24, quoted by R. Zakaria, Ibid, P. 7)

In view of the piecemeal and contextual nature of the Koranic revelations, Muslim theologians felt the need for filling in the perceived gaps or for building suitable structures of doctrine, jurisprudence, and statecraft, particularly when they were faced with the problems of mingling with the non-Arab peoples of different cultural mores in the wake of the rapid spread of Islam. They utilised the Koranic concept of reflection or 'tafakkaru' (34:46) and its associate, Ijtihad (creative interpretation) but subjected it to the procedure of Ijma (consensus of the community, which in practice meant the ulema or men of religious learning), Writing about Ijma, H.A.R. Gibb says as follows: "Indeed on a strict logical analysis, it is obvious that ijma underlies the whole imposing structure and alone gives it final validity. For it is ijma in the first place which guarantees the authenticity of the text of the Koran and of the Traditions. It is ijma which determines how the words of their texts are to be pronounced and what they mean and what direction they have to be applied. But ijma goes much further; it is erected into a theory of infallibility, a third channel of revelation". (Islam, Henry Martyn Institute of Islamic Studies, Hyderabad - 1979, P.65) Gibb also draws attention to the historical fact that the spiritual prerogatives of the Prophet were inherited not only by his successors in the temporal government of the community, the Caliphs, but also by the community as a whole. This process of creative interpretation through ijma led to the development of Islamic Law or Sharia. Although it was "never erected into a formal code, it remained, as it has been well said, 'a

discussion on the duties of Muslims". (H.A.R.Gibb, Ibid, P.68). Several schools of Law (Madhahib meaning ways) emerged, the more important of them being Hanafi, named after Abu Hanifa of Iraq (d.767), Maliki, named after Malik ibn Anas of Medina (d.796), al-Shafii (d. in Egypt 820), and Hanbali named after Ahmed ibn Hanbal of Baghdad (d.855). According to H.A.R.Gibb, "at the present day, the Hanafi School predominates in Western Asia (except Arabia), Lower Egypt and Pakistan; the Shafii in Indonesia; and the Maliki in North and West Africa and Upper Egypt". (Ibid. P. 70). Hanabali School, revived in the 18th century under the name of Wahhabi, now dominated in most of Central and Northern Arabia. All these schools have many substantial agreements in regard to important matters and differ only in some details. So, it would be wrong to describe them as separate sects. In about the 10th century, a great majority of the theologians declared that 'the gate of ijtihad' was closed once and for all, thereby denying the right to scholars, however eminent they might be, to re-interpret the basic texts. The main argument against continuing ijtihad without limit is perhaps to prevent the Koran from becoming a playground for incompetent yet ambitious interpreters and thereby impairing its value as a source of guidance. However, some later theologians continued to lay claim to the right of ijtihad and to interpret in the light of emerging needs and circumstances. It is not surprising that on one reckoning, more than 40,000 commentaries on the Koran are reported to have been published so far. Fatwa collections are also cited by some as a testimony to the continuance of ijtihad. These collections, according to Gibb, reflect "the long struggle which went on for centuries (and still continues) between the Religious Law and local customary law in many Islamic countries and the steady pressure of the religious leaders to assimilate local usages (adat) to the standards of Islamic Law" (Ibid. P. 72). He adds that "In spite of these derogations from its authority, the Shariah always remained in force as an ideal and a final court of appeal, and by its unity and comprehensiveness it formed the main unifying force in Islamic culture". In recent times, some Islamic countries have tried to introduce some changes recently within the limits of shariah, so as to solve some pressing problems. Thus it would be correct to conclude that the right of ijtihad is being exercised in modern times.

Some important facts of the early history of Islam should be noted, as they have a great bearing on its ethos and the behaviour of its followers.

First when God chose Muhammad as His Messenger and commanded him to spread the message, Arabs were steeped in superstition, idolatry, fraudulent practices, sexual excesses and tribalism with its concomitants of honour and revenge. The Prophet's primary mission was, therefore, to rescue the Arab pagans from all these evils, bring them to the path of Allah, and restore the Kaaba, the House of God

in Mecca, believed to have been set up first by Adam and rebuilt by Abraham, to its pristine purity. In fact, the first act of the Prophet after his triumphant re-entry into Mecca and the conversion of the influential Quraishis was to clear the Kaaba of all the existing idols.

Second, Muhammad and his followers had to undergo persecution and self-exile for several years in their effort to fulfill God's mission. While some followers went to Abyssinia for some time, he himself had to shift home to Madina. He had to take up arms to defend his small band of the faithful and don the role of a military commander in more than one battle.

Third, Muhammad had to develop in Madina a set of principles and practices for consolidating the small Muslim community and regulating its relations with other communities in secular matters and these came to be regarded later as the foundation for Islamic law and statecraft. Accordingly, the relevant document (the Aqabah Agreement preserved by Ibn Ishaq) is often referred to as Constitution of Madina (Watt, Muhammad at Madina p. 221-8). The later trends in Islamic history to equate the political institution of state with the religious community (Umma) seem to derive inspiration from this fact.

Similarly, the first and second historical facts mentioned above provided powerful examples for Muslim leaders and rulers of later times in other lands, whenever they thought that their religion was under threat or in need of assertion. Besides, it is argued by some scholars that the Muslim Kings and conquerors behaved as they did because of their notions about the directions of the Koran. The following verses are cited in support. Sura 48:29 says "Muhammad is the messenger of Allah. And those with him are hard against the unbelievers but merciful among themselves." Sura 8:39 reads: "And fight them until persecution is no more and religion is all for Allah. But if they cease, then lo! Allah is seer of what they do". Citing the declaration of Abraham to the folk who worshipped others besides Allah, Sura 60:4 asserts: "And we have done with you. and there has arisen between us and you hostility and hate for ever until you believe in Allah only". All these verses, it must be noted, were revealed at Madina, when Muhammad and his small band of followers were still struggling for their survival and the hostility between them and the Meccans was at its peak. It will therefore be appropriate to understand these verses as essentially contextual, although Muslim warriors of later times might have taken support of these verses for their acts of aggrandisement such as idol-breaking and Jihad against unbelievers. Unfortunately in this process, the great concepts of non-coercion in matters of religion, aloofness from idols, recognition of God's messengers to other peoples which some other Koranic verses preach have received

less attention and importance in some places and times. These verses are cited below.

Sura 2:256 says: "There is no compulsion in religion". Sura 35:24 declares : 'Lo ! we have sent thee with the Truth, a bearer of glad tidings and a Warner; and there is not a nation but a Warner hath passed among them". In Sura 6:108, Allah tells the believers that "We have not set thee as a keeper over them (non-believers), nor art thou responsible for them". Sura 6:109 admonishes the believers in these words: "Revile not those unto whom they pray beside Allah lest they wrongfully revile Allah through ignorance. Thus unto every nation we made their deed seem fair". These verses speak volumes of the catholicity and liberal approach of Koran. That these Koranic statements were not always honoured in practice by some of its followers in their greed and hunger for power is another matter.

Another interesting feature of the Koran is that several Koranic directions are qualified by practical considerations relevant to its time, e.g. multiple marriages, divorce and capacity of women to witness a commercial document. This is indeed unique for a scripture. In all these instances, Koran lays down the normative position clearly and provides for departures on specific grounds. For example, the Koran seems to have permitted multiple marriages, particularly because of the need to provide protection to a large number of women who lost their husbands and fathers in battles that frequently occurred during those times. But they were subjected voluntarily to the consent of the existing spouse or spouses if necessary and the commitment of justice and equal treatment, as laid down in the Koran, conditions which were acknowledged to be very difficult to fulfill. Divorce which was said to be hated most by Allah was allowed under certain circumstances. In another instance, that is witnessing, two females were treated to be equal to one man, because women of the time not being well versed in commerce might be prone to forget. Thus Allah was truly the Master of Relevance: "Allah tasketh not a soul beyond its scope... Our Lord ! Impose not on us that which we have not the strength to bear ! Pardon us, absolve us and have mercy on us....." (2:286)

In the present day, followers of the Koran are divided into several sects and instances of lack of communal amity and conflict between different Islamic sects are reported from time to time. The more prominent sects are Sunni and Shia. In this context mention may also be made of Sufism although no separate sect is based on it. Its values and practices cut across the different sects and have influenced several of their members. It emphasises the mystical path of love and adoration, 'dhikr' (repetitive recitation of Allah's name) and 'sama' (listening to devotional hymns). It recognises 'saints' and 'ascetics' whose dargahs are objects of veneration. Several

Sufi orders are in existence in India: Qadiris, Naqshbandis, Chistis, Qalandaris, etc. This is indeed an interesting aspect of popular Islam in India.

Sunni is the largest sect which is characterised by very high veneration of the Prophet and the emphasis on his practices (Sunna). The Shia which started as a political movement of succession is based on the mystical doctrine that a body of secret knowledge was passed down to Ali, the Prophet's son-in-law and later to his successors. The Imam, the head of the Shia community is believed to be sinless, infallible and fully competent to guide the followers.

The Ahmediyya movement was founded in 1889 by Mirza Ghulam Ahmed of Qadian (Indian Punjab). He referred to the Koranic declaration that God had sent prophets to other peoples too and preached that they should be respected by the Muslims and that God's right to send prophets after Muhammad could not be circumscribed in view of the Koranic recognition of the need to send reminders to human beings from time to time. He, however, stressed that Muhammad was the last law-bearing Prophet and any prophet that might come after Muhammad would be completely sub-ordinate to him. These views are not acceptable to Muslims. As a result Ahmediyyas are not recognised by Muslims.

At this point, it is appropriate to refer to the Koranic phrase, Khataman Nabiyyin or 'the seal of Prophets' (33:40) which has been interpreted to mean that Muhammad is the last Prophet. Note has also to be taken in this context of the Koranic declaration (5:3): "..... This day have I perfected your religion for you and completed my favour unto you, and have chosen for you as religion Al-Islam". This is addressed to believers. This Sura contains special directions on diverse matters such as the manner of prayer, foods to be eaten (halal and haram), relations between believers and their relations and servants, offences against life and property and punishments therefor e.g. cutting off the hands of an unrepentant thief), etc. Al-Islam means surrender to Allah. According to Zakaria (Ibid.P. 120) the third Sura is the last revelation during the Prophet's farewell pilgrimage to Mecca a few months before his death.

One could perhaps ask whether as implied by the above suras Allah had circumscribed his own discretion for all time, despite the extreme prone-ness of man for evil deeds and ever present machinations of Shaitan and the clear need for reminders of God's message. It was in an attempt to answer such questions that Sir Syed Ahmed Khan wrote as follows : "Revelation is unceasing and ever flowing bounty of the truly Absolute Existence. This bounty has never been cut off nor will it ever be cut off in the future "(Tahrir-fi-tafsir, Vol II, Agra 1892, P. 197). It may be added that most Indian Muslims do not accept Sir Syed's formulation, although he is held in high respect for his great services to the Indian Muslim community as a whole.



## CHAPTER - 3

# CONCEPT OF GOD

### COMMON FEATURES

All the three religions, Hinduism, Christianity and Islam describe God uniformly as the creator, preserver and destroyer of this universe as well as the living beings therein and assert His one-ness. He is omni-present, omni-scient and omni-potent. Nothing moves or happens without his knowledge or permission. He is just and awards punishments to doers of wrong and rewards to doers of right. He is also merciful. He extends his grace to those who repent and seek refuge in Him sincerely.

However, each religion lays stress on one aspect or the other, depending on the circumstances of its birth and the needs of the people to whom its message was primarily and immediately addressed. These special features are summarised below.

### SPECIAL FEATURES

#### (1) Hinduism

According to Hinduism, God is called Brahman and the universe. He created Brahmanda. He is formless (Nirakara) and attributelsss (Nirguna). However, He, in his grace, manifests Himself in his three roles, Brahma as creator, Vishnu as preserver and Maheswara as destroyer. Accordingly he is called Trimurthi. He is also called Ishwara or Parameswara. Rigveda affirmed his oneness by saying : "Truth is one; the learned call it by different names", (Ekam Sat Viprah Bahudha Vadanti). Chandogya Upanishad proclaims that Brahman alone exists without a second, (Ekamava Advaitiyam Brahma) - VI. 2-1). Gita says that God appears on earth to re-establish Dharma (righteous living), whenever He in His wisdom feels that evil has grown beyond bounds. Such appearances are called Avatars. Each Avatar, besides exterminating the evil-doer and the evil, sets an example for mortals to emulate and for this purpose he demonstrates how to act in the presence of bodily constraints, the earthly limitations and the compulsions of the times.

#### (2) CHRISTIANITY

According to the Bible, although God is one, He manifests Himself in three ways: God the Father in relation to creation, God the Son in relation to redemption and God the Holy Spirit in relation to sanctification. God is predominantly Light (1 John 1:5) and Love (1 John 4:8). As in Hinduism, God is understood as omnipotent,

omniscient and omnipresent. He is not only just but also compassionate. Often portrayed as father, He loves his creation and does not like its destruction. Accordingly, Christianity has a strong concept of Redemption. That is, God Himself comes to save human kind from the effects of sin such as death and disease and show the path of Salvation. Jesus who is described as 'the only begotten Son' says that "He who has seen me has seen the Father".

### **(3) ISLAM**

Islam declares unambiguously and emphatically that there is no God but Allah. This concept of monotheism (Tauheed) is repeatedly stressed in the Koran. Ninety-nine other names (al-isma-al-husna) are also mentioned. These are essentially the qualities of Allah who is transcendental and thus formless. It is a heinous and unforgivable sin (shirk) to associate any other god with Allah or set up a partner for Him. One of the main aims of the Prophet's mission was therefore to free Allah (a name already in use in Mecca) from the association of goddesses- al-Lat, al-Uzza and Manat - whom the pagans worshipped. Koran rejects the Christian idea of the Son of God. The Koran described Allah as the 'All-wise Creator' (15:86) the Sustainer and the Supreme Authority of the Universe.

## CHAPTER - 4

# APPROACH TO GOD

### COMMON FEATURES

According to the three religions, Hinduism, Christianity and Islam, the ultimate purpose of life is to attain Salvation, in other words, to reach the abode of God and be near Him for ever. Hence the need for efforts to approach God. The three religions affirm that God may be approached through daily prayer, good deeds and correct performance of one's duties. They place righteousness (the second and third methods) over piety (the first item) in its ability to lead man to Heaven, the abode of God. Each person is accountable for his or her deeds and must face the judgement of God. Besides, the three religions also advocate an alternate path for approaching God, which is called sanyas in Hinduism, mysticism in Christianity and tassawuf in Islam.

### SPECIAL FEATURES :

#### (1) Hinduism

In Hinduism, Moksha or deliverance from the cycle of births and deaths, means the merger of the human soul (Atma) with the Supreme (Paramatma). Though this word is often translated into English as Salvation, it must be remembered that the semitic concept of salvation is entirely different as the latter is not derived from the theory of rebirth after death. Hindus believe that God appears before a devotee in the form he desires to worship and thus invokes Him. He becomes Saguna and Saakaara. In other words, man is free to worship God in the form of an idol, embodying one or more manifestations of God's myriad aspects. This led to the concept of Ishta Daivata (the chosen god or goddess), which in turn brought about great catholicity and complexity of worship among the Hindus. Emphasis is on individual prayer and worship. According to tradition, the upper caste Hindus (Dwijas) are required to offer prayers (Sandhya Vandanam) three times every day, at dawn, noon and dusk. The others have no fixed timings for their prayers. Visits to temples and holy places and congregational worship are optional. Bhajans or musical prayers are popular. Further, good or righteous deeds are defined or understood according to the times, places and contexts, as these factors are all subject to change. Great importance is attached to appropriate pronunciation and interpretation of Sanskrit verses and the accompanying rituals. These beliefs gave great power to the priestly classes, learned men and saints. They also gave rise to different schools

of thought and practice. But no formal organisations have been built up to enforce doctrinal purity, or to discipline those who go astray. Excommunication practiced by some Hindu societies was more a social than a religious phenomenon. Finally, Hinduism insists that all deeds have consequences and each soul has to work them out, according to the theory of Karma, through a cycle of births and deaths. Hindus believe that a meticulous account is kept of their deeds and misdeeds by Yama, the God of death and his scribe, Chitragupta and appropriate judgements are pronounced when their souls are lined up in his court after leaving their mortal coils.

## **(2) CHRISTIANITY**

Christianity says that God the Father may be approached through Jesus the Son. Although the use of icons of Jesus and Virgin Mary is allowed by some denominations, idols are not an essential part of Christian worship. The Cross is venerated as an important symbol of Jesus Christ. Christians are required to pray everyday. They observe Sunday as a day of obligation. They are required to go to Church that day. They also believe in the importance of righteous deeds, service to fellow-being and accountability before God on the Day of Judgement. They do not, however, believe in re-birth. The distinguishing feature of Christianity is its formal organisation and this is true of most denominations. A hierarchy of clergy and a church authority exist for guiding the faithful and for interceding on their behalf before God the Father. At one stage, this hierarchy enjoyed wide powers for disciplining those that did not conform to the rules of the organisation.

## **(3) ISLAM**

Islam strictly prohibits the use of idols. Unique among all founders of religions, Muhammad saw to it that no image of himself survived him. Most Muslims believe that the Koran contains a blueprint of correct ethical behaviour. Accordingly, for understanding good deeds and one's duties, Muslims rely on the verses of the Koran, the practices of the Prophet (Sunna) and the Traditions handed down from his days (Hadith). As explained in chapter 3, for interpreting the Koranic verses and the sayings of Hadith, Islam developed the doctrine of ijma or consensus of the community, which in practice came to mean an agreement among the ulema or religious scholars. Islam has not set up a formal organisation and hierarchy or clergy to interpret the Koranic verses and the sayings of Hadith. As explained in chapter 2, the doctrine of ijma gives enormous power to the ulema or the learned scholars of Islam who are called upon to give their expert opinions or fatwas. Some fatwas, particularly those which have pronounced excommunication, death or other

punishment have attracted criticism from the members of the community as well as others in the larger society. Islam lays great stress on the proposition that man is answerable to Allah for all his deeds on the Day of Judgement. To face this Day he will be resurrected. It is asserted that nobody can intercede for him on that Day, except with the permission of Allah. Finally, the 'five pillars of Islam' which set out the five obligations of every Muslim must be noted. The first is the declaration of belief in the unity of God and the prophet-hood of Muhammad. As explained in chapter 2, Most Muslims have, over the centuries, fortified the prophet-hood by declaring Muhammad as the last Prophet. The second insists on praying, preferably in a mosque five times a day, at dawn, noon, afternoon, evening and night. (Shias believe in praying three times). Special importance is attached to Namaz (prayer) at noon on Friday. The third stipulates a fast from sunrise to sunset in the month of Ramadan. Not even a drop of water is allowed during the fast. The aged and the sick are, however, exempted. Ramadan is the month in which the Koran was first revealed. According to the fourth, Zakat must be paid towards the welfare of the poor out of one's assets. The fifth requires a Muslim to perform Hajj or religious pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in his lifetime. Those who are physically disabled or financially incapable are, however, exempted.

## CHAPTER - 5

# RELATIONS BETWEEN MAN AND MAN.

### COMMON FEATURES

All the three religions, Hinduism, Christianity and Islam declare that there is a divine element in man (atma, Soul or nafs). Prof. Fazlur Rahman of the University of Chicago writes that Koran does not appear to endorse the kind of doctrine of a radical mind-body dualism found in Christianity and Hinduism, but Islam accepted it later under the influence of al-Ghazali. This scholar seems to have relied on the Koranic verses (15:29, 32:9, 38:73) which speak of God breathing his own spirit into man after creating him. Man, Prof. Rahman adds, is thus distinguished from the rest of creation. (Major Themes of the Quran, Bibliotheca Islamica, Chicago, 1980) Scriptures demand that relations between human beings must be based on the recognition of this element and the fact of being fellow-creatures of God. Human life being finite and every human being accountable for one's deeds, the three religions uniformly emphasise right conduct towards one another. They have laid down guidelines for distinguishing right conduct from wrong conduct. These guidelines are by and large similar, although one religion may emphasise some aspects while the others stress some other aspects.

### SPECIAL FEATURES

#### (1) Hinduism

Hinduism has laid down elaborate guidelines for the conduct of mutual relations among humans. Although man's duties differ according to his Varna (caste) and Ashrama (his stage in life), the Dharmasutra of Gautama emphasised eight personal values (Atma Gunas) for all men irrespective of Varna and Ashrama: compassion towards all beings (Daya), forbearance and tolerance (Kshanti), absence of envy (Anasuya), purity in thought, word and deed (Saucha), avoiding over-exertion (Anayasa), auspicious habits (mangala), absence of niggardliness or low spiritedness (adainya) and the absence of greed (aspruha). It further declared that a person possessing these eight virtues is sure to reach heaven even if there are deficiencies in sacraments (samskaras) prescribed for his caste or stage in life (varnashrama dharma) (Gautama Dharmasutra, 8:23-26). Manu prescribed ten ordinary duties (Sadharana dharma): steadfastness (dhruti), forgiveness (kshama), control over mind (dama), non-stealing (asteya), purity (saucha), restraint over the sense organs (indriya nigraha), wisdom (dhee), learning (vidya), truth (satya) and freedom from

anger (akrodha). Further on, these ten virtues or duties are abridged into five : non-violence (ahimsa), truth (satya), non-stealing (asteya), purity (saucha) and restraint of senses (indriya nigraha) (Manu, 6:92).

Besides, the Dharma Sastras speak about varnashrama Dharma, i.e., duties based on the four varnas (castes) and four ashramas (stages in life). They emphasise that varna is also a stage in the evolution of the human soul through myriad births and deaths; just as ashramas are stages in the life between birth and death. Earlier, in chapter 3, we have briefly noted that the Gita distinguishes varnas on the basis of man's native qualities (gunas) and karmas (actions) of the previous life and not by birth alone. Three gunas are described : Sattva or goodness, rajas or passion, and tamas or ignorance. Although all the three gunas are present in every man in different proportions, one or the other predominates. When Sattva predominates on a rajasic base, he becomes an intellectual or brahmin. When rajas predominates on a sattvic base, he becomes a kshatriya; when rajas predominates on a tamasic base, he becomes a vaisya, and finally, when tamas predominates on a rajasic base, he becomes a sudra. Thus, the preponderant guna together with the effect of past karma is supposed to determine the varna or caste. Manu envisages a sudra becoming a brahmin or vice versa or the transformation from one caste to another through his own karma and development of his atma as part of the evolutionary process. The reader may find all this rather complicated and very different from the way in which caste has evolved through history to become a rigid concomitant of birth and an oppressive instrument.

Similarly, the concept of ashrama or the stage in life began on a logical perception of an orderly progress in life. Just as the plants progress from seed through root, stem, leaves and flower to fruit in due order, the human must grow from infancy through childhood, youth and maturity to old age. This sequence constitutes the four ashramas : brahmacharya or studentship, grihastha or householdership or married state, vanaprastha or contemplation and social service while dwelling in a forest, and sanyasa or renunciation of all worldly things preparatory to joining the paramatma. It is logical to attach special duties and special relations with other beings to each ashram and to warn that one should not seek the pleasures of one ashram while being in another. As M.D. Chaturvedi says, "But, when the ashramas are disregarded, its (atma's) evolution is marred and so delayed". (Hinduism : The Eternal Religion, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1992, P. 194).

A few words may be added on the sacraments (samskaras) mentioned earlier. They are to be "performed to help the growth and ripening moral virtues". (M.D. Chaturvedi, Ibid, P. 129). Parashara Grihya Sutra mentions 16 sacraments, each

relating to a particular event in life, such as conception (garbhadarana), Namakarana (naming), Annaprasana (first feeding with boiled rice), Vivaha (marriage), and antyesti (Funeral rites).

According to Manu, "The rules of conduct laid down in the Vaidika dharma are intended to secure abhyudaya (worldly joy) and misreyasa, the supreme happiness" (or spiritual bliss) (12:88, quoted by M.D. Chaturvedi, Ibid, P. 210). From this formulation is derived the four purposes of life (Purushastras): dharma, (law and religion), artha (wealth), kama (sensory pleasures), and moksha (liberation). Dharma is the basis of the other three.

Ramayana, Mahabharata and other Puranas have tried to explain the importance of the above-mentioned virtues, duties and right conduct by narrating positive and negative examples. However, over the centuries, varnashrama dharma got distorted and yielded place to sadharana dharma which has gained precedence. Proliferation of sub-castes, practical difficulties in the way of ashrama practices, reform movements, the influence of modern ideas of equality and fraternity and diversification of occupations under economic pressures have aided and furthered this process. In view of these multiple and drastic changes in his environment, ordinary Hindu of the present day tends to seek guidance from Sankaracharyas and other religious gurus in practising sadharana dharma as laid down in the Puranas.

## **(2) CHRISTIANITY**

Christianity speaks of man being created in the image of God. The human being is hailed as the temple of God. Further all men being children of God, they must believe in the brotherhood of man. Jesus stressed that the Kingdom of God is not to be found anywhere except within man but man has to strive hard to be worthy of the kingdom of God. According to the Sermon on the Mount (Mathew 5: 7), the following commandments should guide human relations : (a) Blessed are the peace-makers; for, they shall be called the children of God; (b) Thou shalt not commit adultery (which includes even the desire in one's heart); (c) Thou shalt not forswear thyself but shall perform unto the Lord thine oaths; (d) whosoever shall strike thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also; Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you. Jesus stressed repeatedly that "evil thoughts, murder, adultery, false witness, slander are things which defile man. It is out of the heart that these frustrations and evil are brought about. It is only by love and faith will man become truly whole and conquer his basic instincts." It deserves to be noted that these biblical teachings did not stand in the way of Christian men of one denomination persecuting Christians of other denominations or justifying the slave trade in African blacks in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It is only when



the Age of Enlightenment dawned after the French Revolution that the movements for civil liberties and other liberal values revived some of the teachings of Jesus.

### (3) ISLAM

Islam lays great stress on brotherhood of man, fairplay, justice, adherence to commitments and above all charity to fellow beings. Surah 5:8 admonishes believers as follows : "Be steadfast witnesses for Allah in equity, and let not hatred of any people seduce you that ye deal not justly. Deal justly that is nearer to your duty. Observe your duty to Allah". Earlier, in sura 4:111-2, Allah had warned that "Whoso committeth sin committeth it only against himself" and that if he blames someone innocent of his own sin, "hath burdened himself with falsehood and a flagrant crime". Further, Sura 4:36 requires a believer to show kindness not only to parents, 'near kindred', orphans, the needy and the neighbour who is of kin (unto you) but also "the neighbour who is not of kin, and the fellow-traveller and the wayfarer and (the slaves) who your right hands possess". The verse ends with the assertion: "Lo ! Allah loveth not such as are proud and boastful". Paighamber-E-Ikhlaq (E. Sahibzada Sajidul Rahman Institute of Islamic Research, Islamabad, 1985 : P.216) quotes Bukhari's account of the Prophet's verdict on the fate of two lady companions, one of whom offered regular prayers, charity and alms but was sharp-tongued and used to offend her neighbours with her pungent remarks, and the other who offered only the minimum number of prayers but was soft-spoken, helpful and pleasant to others. The Prophet is reported to have remarked that while the first one will have a place in hell, the second one will enter heaven in view of her virtuous behaviour. A Muslim is sternly warned: "Be ye staunch in justice, witness for Allah, even though it be against yourselves or (your) parents or (your) kindred whether (the case be of) a rich man or a poor man, for Allah is nearer unto both (than ye are)" (4:135). Again, in Sura 16:91, the Koran says : "Fulfill the covenant of Allah, when ye have covenanted and break not your oaths after the observation of them and after you have made Allah surety over you. Lo ! Allah knoweth what ye do". The Prophet cautioned his companions "against oppressing and torturing the non-Muslim subjects or humiliating them or forcibly depriving them of their rightful possessions." (Abu Dawood, Vol.2 quoted in Paighamber-E-Ikhlaq, P.166 Ibid). The same source also records Prophet's clear declaration that he would stand for the non-Muslims against the guilty Muslims on the Day of Judgement, should any of the latter be found guilty of the reprehensible acts cited therein. It is a relevant point for reflection how and why these great and noble teachings came to be ignored in practice by Muslim conquerors in their quest for power, wealth and glory.

## CHAPTER - 6

# RELATIONS BETWEEN MAN AND WOMAN

### COMMON FEATURES

According to the scriptures of Hinduism, Christianity and Islam, what is said in Chapter 5 applies equally to man's relations with woman. Virtuous conduct in relation to woman is given special importance, as woman is the vehicle for the continuation of the family and the race. It is, however, unfortunate that the woman's special endowments have been her un-doing. The followers of the three religions have, in actual practice, fallen short of honouring the scriptural prescriptions. This is mainly due to historical circumstances of the origin and spread of each religion, the general dominance of the male and other social, economic and political factors. It is a pity, that religious leaders of different hues have tried to provide scriptural support to the denial of the legitimate rights of women, particularly their right to be treated as an equal and essential partner in accordance with the scheme of God's creation.

### SPECIAL FEATURES

#### (1) Hinduism

Hinduism has goddesses in its pantheon and Shakti, the feminine form of divine power, is widely worshipped. Woman is required to be given a high place of honour in a Hindu family. Marriage is treated as a sacrament and a commitment for seven lives. Wife is described as ardhangini (half body) and Sahadharmacharini (a compulsory co-performer in all religious rites and other grihasta dharmas or householder duties).

According to a mantra recited in the marriage ceremony, the bridgeroom tells the bride : "Hereafter you will be the lord over the members of my family, your in-laws, viz., my father and mother, my sisters and brothers". Manusmriti declares : "Fathers, brothers, husbands and brothers-in-law who wish for good fortune should revere the women and adore them. The gods delight in places where women are revered but where women are not revered, all rites are fruitless. When women of the family are miserable, the family is soon destroyed, but it always thrives when the women are not miserable" (Manusmriti, 9th edition, Nirnayasagar Press, Bombay, 1933, Chapter 3, P.55-7). The same authority stresses the need for protection of women in all stages of life, by fathers in youth, by husbands after marriage and by sons in old age (Manusmriti, Ibid, Chap. 9, Verse 3); this verse is understood by most Hindus to mean that women do not deserve freedom in any stage and is therefore required to

be under the protection of one male or the other. Despite these and other exhortations in the Hindu Dharmasastras, Hindu women came to be exploited by their men over the centuries and several social evils such as dowry deaths, bigamy, polygamy, denial of property rights, harassment of widows, sati, etc., have made their presence felt, to the utter contradiction of the high ideals of Sanatan Dharma, which produced great women like Maitreyi and Gargi. However, it will not be correct to give the impression that Manu and other law-makers of the ancient times did not make pronouncements that proved to be harmful to women. For example, Manu says in 5:154, 'A virtuous wife should constantly serve her husband like a god, even if he behaves badly, freely indulges his lust and is devoid of any good qualities'. Padmapurana equates a pativrata to a slave. The relieving feature is that reformers have appeared from time to time to rid the Hindu society of the above said evils. Efforts are continuing. But the hard fact is that much remains to be done.

## **(2) Christianity**

Virgin Mary is held in very high esteem by some Christian denominations and viewed as a powerful intermediary for attaining divine grace. Christianity ruled from the very beginning in favour of monogamy and did not provide for the annulment of marriage once sanctified. Speaking of marriage, Mathew 19:6 says: "Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder". In a later para (8), it is asserted as follows : "Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery". Changes were, however, brought about in the sixteenth century as a result of Reformation and later by other movements. These movements were essentially socio-political in nature and origin. They are the result of the widespread female education and large-scale female participation in hitherto male occupations. The Christian lands have witnessed a phenomenal growth of feminism and a concerted drive for empowerment of women during the latter part of the twentieth century.

## **(3) Islam**

The Koran did revolutionise by its teachings the status of women in Arab society. In the 7th century, Arabs treated women as worse than chattels, girl child as an undesirable and expendable thing, and marriages as convenient means of tribal affiliation. Un-limited polygamy was practised. In this context, the Koran sought to limit the number of wives to four. It added : "....., and ye fear that ye can not do justice (to so many), ..... then marry one only" (4:3). There is another verse which says "you will not be able to deal equally between (your) wives, however much ye wish (to do so)" (4:129). As Ashgar Ali Engineer says, "The idea of justice for all wives

was very central to the concept of polygamy in Islam". Some scholars have interpreted these verses as a clear advice in favour of monogamy, while others preferred to leave the number of wives to the discretion and decision of each man within the prescribed limit. Widows are allowed to marry again. According to Rafiq Zakaria and other scholars, Surah 4, Al-Nisa (The Women) was revealed immediately after the battles of Badr and Uhud which made many women widows. It is believed that Allah intervened to tackle the many problems of these women. The Islamic marriage being a contract, husbands are required to pay mehr at the time of marriage, live with their wives 'in kindness' (4:19) and in the event of divorce make 'a fair provision' according to one's means (2:236). While divorce is permitted, Islam lays down a compulsory waiting period, iddat, which Prof. Carlson has described as 'supreme innovation of Quran' (65:1). In Sura 4:34, wives are told that "Men are incharge of women because God hath made one of them to excel the other and because they spend their property (for the support of women)" and that "So, good women are the obedient, guarding in secret that which God hath guarded". In the event of wives' misconduct, the husband is allowed to 'admonish them and banish to beds apart, and scourge them". The word 'scourge' used by Pickthall is replaced by the words 'beat lightly' in some translations. It is interesting to note the admonition that if the wife becomes obedient once again, the husband must not seek a pretext to ill-treat her. The Koran permits divorce although the Prophet is on record saying that "of all the lawful things, God detests nothing more than divorce". (Rafiq Zakaria, Ibid, P.80). As regards inheritance, the Koran declares categorically that the women shall be given her 'legal share', 'whether little or much' (4:7). It recognises the right of nine female relatives, viz., wife, mother, consanguine and uterine sisters. It adds that in the case of brothers and sisters, the male will have share equivalent to that of two females' (4:11-12). The concept of a man being equal to two women occurs in another context too, i.e., witnessing credit transaction documents. Two male signatures or one male signature and two female signatures are prescribed on the ground that a female may err 'through forgetfulness', presumbaly due to lack of experience in financial matters (2:282). As regards the general deportment, the Koran advises the believing women "to lower their gaze and be modest and to display their adornment only that which is apparent and to draw their veils over their bosoms and not to reveal their adornment save to their own husbands or fathers or husbands' fathers, or their sons or their husbands' sons, or their brothers' sons or sisters' sons, or their women, or their slaves, or male attendants who lack vigour, or children who know naught of women's nakedness". (24:31). In some translations, the word 'nakedness' is replaced by 'private parts of women'. This plus the sunna of Prophet's wives keeping away from the prying glances of the uncouth Beduins and

the prevalence of the veil among the Persian converts seem to have led to the practice of burqa and purdah by Muslim women of later ages.

According to Mernissi Fatima, several factors have combined over the centuries to deprive Muslim women of their freedom, dignity and equality that the Koran and the Prophet sought to bestow on them. (Women and Islam", A historical and theological enquiry; Kali for women). Military and historical compulsions, the influence of other cultural groups who embraced Islam, the prevalent systems of male dominance led to some distortions in the understanding of the original message of the Koran. Fatima is harsh on Hijab or the veil which acts as the most effective instrument today of seclusion and marginalisation of Muslim women.

## **CHAPTER -7**

### **RELATIONS BETWEEN MAN AND NATURE**

#### **Common Features**

By Nature, we mean all living beings on earth other than the human, as well as all non-living things. The three religions, Hinduism, Christianity and Islam, say that Nature and its resources should be used by man carefully, without wasting them.

#### **SPECIAL FEATURES**

##### **(1) Hinduism**

According to Hinduism, Nature is but the modification (parinama) of the five elements (panchabhuta: earth, water, fire, air and ether- Akasa) and God manifests Himself in the form of Nature for the purpose of fulfilling the Law of Karma. Billions of beings from the smallest insect to the biggest animal in the world assume their forms in accordance with fruits of their Karma. Therefore, Hindus believe that Nature is not created only or mainly for the enjoyment of man and that therefore, human beings must live in harmony with it. In making use of Nature, human beings must practise ahimsa or non-injury to the maximum extent possible. It is recognised that in the ordinary course of living, men do commit 'himsa' in regard to vegetable life and insects. These are called Pancha Sunas, for the expiation of which man is directed to perform five Maha Yagnas : Brahma Yagna or the study of the Vedas, Pitru Yagna or libations to ancestors, Deva Yagna or offerings to fire for the gods, Bhuta Yagna or giving food to animals and birds and Manushya Yagna or entertaining guests. The moral implication of the above direction and the related rituals is that need and not greed should govern the use of natural resources by man. The emphasis of Hinduism on vegetarianism, sacred groves, cow-worship and kindness to animals and birds is the consequence of this concept of Nature. But over centuries, all these ideas underwent serious distortions and acquired needless rigidities and far-fetched interpretations.

##### **(2) Christianity**

The Bible declares that man is created to civilise the earth and is therefore expected to exercise dominion on all other forms of life. According to Genesis 1:28, God said "Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth and subdue it : and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth". This statement has, of late, been interpreted to mean that man would fail in his office of dominion, if he were to exploit the natural

resources to the detriment of the land, plant life, animals, rivers and seas.

### **(3) Islam**

According to the Koran, Allah has placed man on the earth as his vicegerent (Khalifah) with the authority to make use of the vast natural resources for his comfort and convenience. The following verses are relevant in this context : "And,(Allah) hath made of service unto you whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth; it is all for Him. Lo ! herein verily are portents for people to reflect" (45:13) "And we have given you (mankind) power in the earth and appointed for you therein a livelihood. Little give ye thanks" (7:10). Man is required to use the natural resources intelligently, carefully and with skill, avoiding wastage. The verse 7:31 says "O children of Adam : Look to your advancement at every place of worship, and eat and drink, but be not prodigal. Lo ! He loveth not the prodigals". The optimal utilisation of natural resources is also stressed in another context. While speaking of the twelve springs gushing out of the rock at the strike of the staff by Moses, Allah commanded that the water must be used without 'act (ing) corruptly, making mischief on the earth" (2:60).

## CHAPTER - 8

# RELATIONS BETWEEN MAN, RELIGION AND STATE

### COMMON FEATURES

In the beginning, every religion including Hinduism, Christianity and Islam, tried to establish, in practice, its jurisdiction and control over all aspects of human life. Organisation of society and its political structure were no exceptions. The ruler, be he a Rajah, King or Sultan, was required to defer to the opinion of the religious leaders in matters of state. But as time progressed, the head of state began to assert his authority and enlarge the area of his operation and limit the scope for intervention by religious leaders. This trend was accelerated by developments in the field of religion itself. Through interpretation of the original scriptures and otherwise, each religion gave birth to different denominations, sects and schools of thought. Similarly, through wars and conquests, peoples professing diverse religions came to live in one state. Society thus tended to become increasingly pluralistic and the state had to deal with people practising different faiths and creeds. In this context, it has become imperative for the state to guarantee the right of the followers of every religion and sect to practise and propagate their tenets freely but without impinging on similar rights of the followers of other religions and sects. At the same time, each religion has had to vacate some space in human affairs to the state, so that the political authority can safeguard the rights of all in accordance with the prevalent perceptions of human rights such as equality, liberty and fraternity. Important and wise leaders of different religions have thus found it necessary to counsel their followers to practise tolerance, mutual understanding and restraint in their relations with the state agencies as well as with the followers of other faiths.

### SPECIAL FEATURES

#### (1) Hinduism

Ramayan, Mahabharat and the Puranas are full of stories of kings seeking the guidance of rishis, gurus or sages in dealing with matters of state. The latter are not to be equated with religious leaders per se. By and large, they owed their positions in the royal courts to their erudition, wisdom and competence in interpreting correctly the dharma, viz., the very laws that sustained the society and the state. This arrangement facilitated the historic trend to enlarge the space of the state at the expense of religion, without too much of a conflict or disturbance. Further, the Vedic concept of Truth being one but amenable to different interpretations by the wise



(Ekam Sat Viprah Bahudha Vadanti) enabled the Hindu state to practise catholicity and tolerance as part of its policy. This explains the felicity with which Hindu rulers of the west coast allowed the Jews, the early Christians, the Muslim traders of Arabia and the Parsi immigrants of a later date to settle down on Indian soil and practise their respective religions without let or hindrance. But when the followers of Islam came to North India as conquerors and set up their own kingdoms, the Hindu attitude underwent a drastic change. The same applies to Christianity which followed the British flag. These facts explain, to some extent, the recent trend of some Hindus threatening to treat the followers of religions of foreign origin as aliens and argue in favour of denying them the usual rights of Indian citizenship, despite the clear declaration to the contrary in the Indian Constitution. This trend is, indeed, deplorable and needs to be stemmed. There is however, no doubt that the Indian state with a Hindu majority will, in law, remain a secular state in accordance with the Vedic concept cited above.

## **(2) CHRISTIANITY**

Jesus, the founder of Christianity, recognised the legitimate role of the state and called on his followers to distinguish the claims of the ruler and the claims of religion. He preached: "Render therefore unto Caesar the things, which be Caesar's and unto God the things, which be God's" (St. Luke 20:25). The Bible requires the Christians to make "supplications, prayers, inter-cessions and giving of thanks" "for kings and for all that are in authority", so that "we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty" (1 Timothy 2: 1&2). In his first letter, St. Peter exhorted as follows: "Be subject for Law's sake to every human institution .....Honour all men, Love the brotherhood. Fear God.....". Here emphasis has been laid on the plurality of cultures and ideologies and the respect for them. However, in the Middle Ages, the Pope and his Bishops claimed, in the name of God, extensive powers over the political state and other social institutions. This trend was reversed by the Reformation of the sixteenth century and the consequent end to the overlordship of the papacy. Several denominations came into being but each denomination vied with the other in exercising its authority, more or less like the papacy, with the help of the rulers subscribing to its ideology. It took several decades of mutual persecution for the different denominations to realise the wisdom of the Biblical dictum and to put into practice the salutary principle of secularism and respect for diverse ideologies. Today, the states in the Christian countries by and large adhere to the principle of secularism.

## **(3) ISLAM**

The Koran says, without mentioning the state specifically: "There is no

compulsion in religion" (2:256). Another verse (10:38) describes the Koran as "confirmation of that which was before it and an exposition of that which is decreed for mankind - There is no doubt -from the Lord of the Worlds". In other words the Koran is a confirmation of earlier messages from God. Allah's intentions are made crystal clear in the following words: "Had Allah willed He could have made you (all) one nation, but He sendeth whom He will astray and guideth Whom He will, and Ye will indeed be asked of what ye used to do". (16:93) The Koran further asks the Muslims to tell the disbelievers "unto you, your religion and unto me my religion" (109:1-6), although what the two groups worship are entirely different. As a result of these clear commandments from on High, the early Muslim rulers and conquerors scrupulously adhered to the principle of tolerance. They gave the choice to the new peoples either to embrace Islam or to retain their particular religions and pay the prescribed taxes to the Muslim state. The Prophet sternly cautioned his Companions "against oppressing and torturing the non-Muslim subjects or forcibly depriving them of their rightful possessions. If the Muslims were found guilty of any of these reprehensible acts he i.e., Muhammad (SAS) will stand for the non-Muslims against the guilty Muslims on the Day of Judgement." (Abu Dawood Vol. 2 quoted in Paighamber -E-Ikhlaq, Ibid, P 166). In this context, it is appropriate to recall the oft-quoted incident of Caliph Omar politely declining to offer his evening prayer in the Church of Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem soon after his victorious entry into the city, lest his act should persuade his followers to claim it for themselves as a converted mosque. However, several of the later Muslim conquerors and rulers, particularly of Turkish and Afghan origin, departed from this Koranic code of political conduct towards places of worship of other religions for various reasons, like greed for the booty, assertion of ego, a loud symbol of subjugation etc. In modern times too, countries with Muslim majorities tend to declare themselves as Islamic states and to adopt policies of discrimination of varying degrees against the minorities professing other faiths, some of which do derive their inspiration from the Koran itself. There are, however, some shining examples of Muslim majority states practising the Koranic principles of tolerance and peace. Muslims living as minorities in states dominated by followers of other religions do have a duty to support the second kind of states rather than the first, if they are to be true to the message of the Prophet. All these facts and considerations have to be borne in mind while understanding the other Koranic concepts of Umrah and Jihad. What does Umrah mean? Does it signify a community for religious purposes only or does it also demand extra-territorial loyalty in the political sense? Similarly, how Jihad, which originally meant struggle in the path of Allah, be interpreted in the modern context of pluralist states and the rapid globalisation? Finding satisfactory answers to these and similar questions consistently with the Koranic spirit, is the biggest challenge facing the Muslims of the present day.

# DIALOGUE - ISSUES FOR INTERACTION

Max Mueller, the German Philosopher, is reported to have said : "He who knows only one religion, in effect, knows none". The preceding chapters must have given the reader a fair idea of the essential aspects of the three major religions practised in India and enabled him to be an effective interlocutor. He should be in a position to conduct a dialogue with fellow Indians professing the two religions other than his own. The purpose of the dialogue, as pointed out earlier, is to promote amity among the three communities and to integrate them into a single nation emotionally and politically through such interaction.

A dialogue implies the raising of questions and the search for agreed answers to them. Some of the relevant questions are given below, by way of example, to enable the reader to think over and respond suitably. These are not exhaustive.

- (1) Considering that the main objective of a religion is to reach the abode of God through good conduct on earth, what is one's duty to oneself and other fellow beings ? Does it not exclude mutual enmity or violence based on excessive dedication to one's own religious path ?
- (2) What is the meaning of the saying 'Sab ka Malik Ek Hai' ? Does not the accountability stressed by all the three religions include communal amity and the avoidance of mutual conflict ?
- (3) Are the special features of the three religions and the consequent differences in the religious paths (i.e. mode of prayer, types of rituals, formulae of invocation, etc.) so paramount as to override the common features and to justify frequent conflicts among their followers ?
- (4) Is it necessary for proving one's dedication to one's own religion to attack the places of worship belonging to other religions ? As one attack by one religious group leads to retaliatory attack by another and thus starts a chain reaction, what should the religious leaders do, even from the standpoint of their own religion ?
- (5) What is the correct attitude towards past attacks on places of worship, some of which at least were primarily motivated by factors unrelated to devotion to one's religion and obeisance to one's God ?

- (6) Is it possible to adopt the attitude of 'give and take' among the followers of different religious sects and castes in view of their many common features? If so, how is this attitude to be reflected in daily practice and socio-political inter-action ?
- (7) Considering that every scriptural text, divine revelation or otherwise, contains universal dictums as well as contextual exhortations, is it not necessary to separate them carefully and re-interpret them, particularly the latter, in the light of the present or emerging circumstances ? Is it correct to freeze the interpretation at a date long gone by ?
- (8) Good conduct being the universally accepted passport to the abode of God, it needs to be updated constantly and re-defined from time to time in the light of changing circumstances. Can a consensus be reached on its meaning and other details among the religious leaders? As a consensus is desirable, is it possible to create a mutually agreed forum for the purpose of evolving the consensus?
- (9) While religious leaders must have the right to warn and admonish those who stray from the path of good conduct as interpreted by them, should there be a limit to such right ? For example, can they appropriate to themselves the right to extinguish life itself through their decrees ?
- (10) Considering that individuals are strictly accountable to God on the Day of Judgement, how are they to reconcile their actions as members of a religious community, if some of those actions are contrary to the canons of individual good conduct ?

The layman who reads this brochure and wishes to participate in an inter-religious dialogue must first list out the points relating to his own religion, that call for reflection and then ready himself to hear the views of those of the other faiths, with an open mind and without rancour or self-righteousness. He must guard against the temptation of closing his mind on the ground that religions are based on faith and the details thereof are not open even to reflection and re-interpretation in the light of emerging needs and circumstances.